

## Reminiscences of a Pioneer Boy

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ISSN 0003-4827

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### Recommended Citation

Orr, Ellsion. "Reminiscences of a Pioneer Boy." *The Annals of Iowa* 40 (1971), 530-560.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.7974>

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every two years whereas the city manager is appointed by the council. Shenandoah has a full-time police force and a fully equipped volunteer fire department also. Because of our extensive mailing business, postal receipts at the Shenandoah post office are in excess of \$1,000,000; a sum that is equal to the postal receipts in towns eight times our size.

Shenandoah, Iowa is a town of nearly 7,000 people located in the excellent farming country of south-west Iowa. We think our city is an attractive and interesting place to live and visit.

Looking towards the future, we see the realization of yesterday's dreams. Every achievement begins with the efforts of people like our neighbors who contribute their time, talents and energies toward making our town of Shenandoah grow and thrive. These energetic, spirited Americans make our town great and, ultimately, our nation. For every community like ours, the future is filled with rich promises.

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## REMINISCENCES OF A PIONEER BOY

by Ellison Orr

Edited with an introduction by Marshall McKusick

FOREWORD: THE MAN BEHIND THE REMINISCENCES

by Marshall McKusick

State Archaeologist  
Iowa City, Iowa

*The following material represents the first four chapters of Ellison Orr's **Reminiscences**. The remaining chapters of this autobiography will appear in the next issue of the ANNALS.*

A number of years ago I first read this unpublished and almost unknown autobiography by Ellison Orr. I was fascinated with his account of growing up in the middle years of the nineteenth century; he was a rare man with many talents. His life spanned almost a century from 1857 to 1951.

Born in a log cabin on his father's farm he grew up among the neighbors, woods, fields and sloughs he so charmingly describes in his *Reminiscences*. As a young man he taught school and was a bank clerk in Postville; and moving to Waukon, the countyseat, he worked as surveyor, land salesman and clerk of court. In 1904, at the age of 47, his life took another direction. Orr became a businessman in Waukon, managing the local district of the Bell Telephone Company for the next twenty-five years.

During all of this time he was an amateur naturalist. The rugged northeastern Iowa hill country formed an ecological region unique to the state and attracted the attention of a number of scholars. A knowledgeable resident of Allamakee County, with a wide circle of friends, Orr provided considerable assistance to the men making the scientific studies. At the turn of the century he guided Samuel Calvin around the geological outcrops. Calvin had by this time reorganized the State Geological Survey after it had been discontinued for a period of years, and he was the State Geologist. Orr also became the friend of two distinguished botanists—Bohumil Shimek and Louis Hermann Pammel—who were beginning systematic interpretations of the state's prairie and forest plants. He was also interested in history and during the late 1930s, when Fort Atkinson (1840-1849) was being excavated, he sent notes and plans to Sigurd Reque who was making the first major archaeological exploration and reconstruction of a historic frontier site within the state. It was through another friend, Charles R. Keyes of the Iowa Archaeological Survey, that Ellison Orr was to make his lasting scholarly contribution.

The Archaeological Survey was set up in 1922 by the late Benjamin Shambaugh of the State Historical Society, Iowa City. Despite its high-sounding title, the Survey was little more than work space and summer salary for its sole employee, Keyes himself, a professor of German at Cornell College in Mount Vernon and like Orr, an amateur ornithologist with interests in archaeology. During the next decade Keyes did a little excavating and visited the amateur collectors around the state. From his study of their speci-

mens Keyes was able to separate out some of the major prehistoric cultural traditions and named them.

With the coming of the depression in the 1930s, the federal Works Projects Administration or W.P.A. financed public projects to provide work for the unemployed. Archaeology, it was found, fitted nicely into this scheme and soon after the program started, crews of men began to excavate sites under professional guidance throughout the United States. The State Historical Society, forced by limited funds to make economies, shifted Keyes to the University of Iowa summer payroll, and he subsequently wrote annual summaries of his work for the Dean of the Graduate College. The first summer of the large scale excavations was 1934 and Keyes personally directed some of the fieldwork, employing his friend Ellison Orr as assistant director. Orr, thereafter, was in full charge of the excavations of the Survey; from 1935-1939 he conducted surveys and excavations in northeast, northwest, and southwest Iowa while Keyes remained in the laboratory at the University of Iowa to supervise the cataloguing and to study the specimens.

It should be remembered that Ellison Orr was 77 years old in 1934 when he came out of retirement and began work as an archaeologist. He was 83 years old when he last led a crew aided by his son Fred Orr. And no doubt he would have continued but the funding gave out before he did. Through the 1940s, as his manuscripts tell us, Orr was still working with amateurs, visiting sites and taking notes.

Viewed in terms of accomplishment, the original synthesis by Keyes defined the prehistoric traditions, and Orr's excavations subsequently provided the scientific data defining their content. Working winters, Orr wrote ten manuscript volumes of archaeological reports during the 1930s and early 1940s. He then began a reorganization of his reports which came to another five volumes, activity that only ended with his death at the age of 93. Several of the volumes are excellent and they are all of considerable interest. Collectively they form a tribute to the diligence of his efforts.

These volumes document the sizeable and, in some cases, unique collections from the first well-controlled and

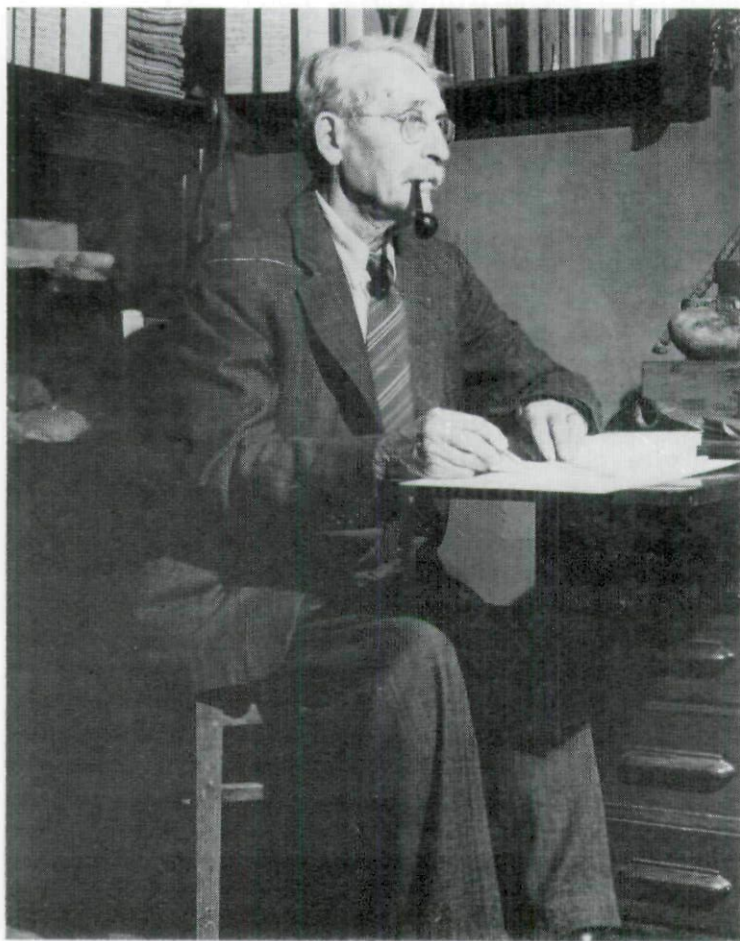


representative excavations made in Iowa. They represent a descriptive key of considerable importance, a fact well recognized by the next generation of archaeologists working in the state during the 1950s and 1960s who obtained much of their information from them after the Iowa Archaeological Survey itself had become dormant with the death of Keyes. In the long term Ellison Orr has become a more important figure than Keyes himself because of the data Orr found and described, and the specimens he obtained. The bulk of the collections reside at the State Historical Society with many of the type specimens being at the University of Iowa Archaeological Laboratory and at Effigy Mounds.

The Orr focus of Oneota culture was named to commemorate his work. At the age of 92 he received the honorary degree, Doctor of Science, from Cornell College, Iowa. He was instrumental in setting aside, as a preserve, Fish Farm Mounds and with Keyes, worked towards establishing Effigy Mounds National Monument. It has been suggested that the Visitor's Center at Effigy Mounds may be named for him, regulations permitting. I hope this will prove possible.

Turning now to the *Reminiscences* of Orr's boyhood, the typed manuscript was a badly faded copy duplicated by some obsolete method. I don't know where the original is now. The version followed here is in the Library of Effigy Mounds National Monument with copies of all the other Orr manuscripts. The role of an editor may range from prefunctory to something short of major surgery, and so it is necessary to say that I made a substantial number of changes in preparing the manuscript for press. These went beyond corrections in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. His repetitive single sentence paragraphs were combined to conform to customary usage. His headings were inconsistent and these were changed. The manuscript was a preliminary version, not originally intended for publication, and it needed a thorough reorganization, eliminating repetitions, and deleting what in my opinion was trivia. What I hope emerges is a clearer perspective of the pioneer lifeway—the destruction of birds, animals, and their habitat, the difficulties of farming and homemaking with a primitive technology, and finally the closeness of neighbors and social life.

Nearing retirement from business in 1928 Orr wrote: "What a wealth of information about the pioneer days of his young manhood my father must have acquired. Yet he put off writing it up till old age had dulled the memory of it all. By his delay how much of interest has been lost to



Ellison Orr

us. Lest I also procrastinate, here and now I am beginning these *Reminiscences of a Pioneer Boy*. What I can remember I will set down, trusting that you who may read may be able

to envision the thing in which I had a living part." These lines appear under "a Resolve" before the *Reminiscences* begin, dated 1928, Waukon. He worked at intervals on the book until 1933 when he dedicated himself to the professional study of archaeology.

### 1. Family

In the year 1838 the discouraging, never ending struggle for a bare existence without hope of betterment brought to America, as an emigrant from the North of Ireland, a middle-aged Scotch Presbyterian farmer, his wife and family. This farmer was my grandfather on my father's side, Robin Orr; and his wife, my grandmother, was Ann Brennan, of Irish descent. Among the children was my father, James Orr, then a lad of nine years of age.

In these days of sight-seeing and travel, it is hard for us to realize the courage it then took those early emigrants to break away from the customs, traditions and associations of generations, and from the uneventful established groove in which their lives ran. That was long before the day of the swift ocean liner, and they were thirty-one days at sea in the sailing vessel in which they crossed the Atlantic.

My grandfather was the holder of a lease on a twenty-acre farm near the village of Castle Dearg, on the river Dearg near Londonderry. On this was a one-story, two-room house of stone with a thatched roof. There was a loft above and the floor of clay was tramped solid and smooth by bare feet.

As things went at that time they were not considered poor, yet they were not often able to eat white, wheat bread, or meat, and sometimes they actually suffered for want of food. My father used to tell how once when they had only potatoes to eat, and not enough of these, the children stole them out of the pot where they had just been boiled, hid them in the cat hole, a place left in the stone wall for the cat to come and go, and later they stole outside to eat them.

Yet in spite of what to his grandchildren seems poverty, they had great pride in their ancestry. As an evidence that they could lay claim to being well related, my father would tell of an uncle who occasionally came over from Scotland



to visit them and who wore fine clothes and carried a gold-headed cane, and of whom the children evidently stood in great awe.

The oldest son and daughter had preceded the parents to America and there were other friends and relatives who had been writing glowing descriptions of the new land. They went directly to a large settlement of their countrymen near Seneca Lake in central New York. The little village, which was the center of their community, was named Tyrone after the county of that name in the land they had left.

My maternal grandfather, James Ellison, after whom I was named, also came from the north of Ireland, as did my maternal grandmother, Jane Ellison, who was also of the Scotch-Irish. The knowing ones tell us that my mother's family name was derived from Macalister or McAlester, a clan name, and that when the particular branch from which she is descended was driven from Loupe in Argyshire to the lowlands by the followers of Robert the Bruce, it became Alison and afterwards Allison or Ellison.

Working on the farm with his father, being a bound boy for five years to a Presbyterian preacher-farmer, helping to log the great windrows of white pine and hemlock logs that would be a fortune to the present owners if they were on the same land now, and afterwards burning them, going to school, and afterwards teaching, my father grew to manhood.

My father, in the spring of 1855, came out to Iowa. During the summer of that year he worked most of the time for his brother John who had previously settled about three miles out of McGregor on the Old Military Road to Fort Atkinson. My uncle's farm lay at the head of the ravine up which the road ran from McGregor, and that part of this same road is still known as the John Orr Hill. Some time during the year my father, who had been looking about for a location for a home, purchased eighty acres from a man named Riddell.

In the fall my father returned to New York state, where on January 1st, 1856, he was married to Margaret Ann Ellison. In the spring following their marriage, my parents came



out to the home my father had bought. There was a railroad as far as Dunleith, East Dubuque, and from there they came to McGregor by steamboat. Reaching there in the evening, my father left his young wife at the tavern, where the only guests seemed to be a crowd of rough, drunken men. He then walked out three miles to his brother's in order to get him to bring my mother and the baggage out to his home.

Not long afterwards they drove the twenty-five miles out to their new home in a lumber wagon drawn by oxen. My uncle Sam was the driver, and as they were good singers, they shortened the way by singing hymns and other songs of that day. My uncle improved the opportunity to entertain his new sister-in-law with choice tales of the new and very strange country to which she had come. Among other things, I remember her telling how he said that the scrubby burr oaks along the road, in their season, bore beautiful rose-colored blossoms like morning glories, and he made her believe it.

It was a beautiful spring day when my mother first saw the farm that was to be her home for so long. In all the sixty-eight years that have come and gone since that day, she has seen the wild beauty of the prairie and brush land gradually disappear and give place to rich meadows and fields, and the log cabins give way to comfortable homes and big red barns.

The house was at the back or west end of the eighty and was built there because of the spring that welled up just in front of the door. A log stable stood a little to the northeast, and somewhere between was the garden where the deer used to come at night and eat the lettuce, the cabbage, the sweet corn and the turnips. Often on June nights, the whippoorwill would pour out his complaining notes from the very doorstep.

Just to the west of the house was a wide, wet slough across which was placed a corduroy road of poles. Through the middle of this slough ran a prairie brook of deep little pools connected by shallower reaches. Its banks were overhung by a luxuriant growth of grass and sedges and

here and there were bunches of willows. There were minnows and chubs in the pools, for I remember my father catching them once from the log bridge of the corduroy road. Across the years I can see him now standing there on the bridge with the pole he had cut from the willows and the fish he had caught.

Across the slough to the west, southwest, and northwest, was a great tract of young red oak brush land that had grown up since the Indians had been removed from the country and the annual burnover had ceased. A yoke of oxen and a lumber wagon could be driven almost anywhere through this brush land right over the young trees. Scattered about in this second growth, sometimes singly, sometimes in groups, were the old seed trees, often with part of their tops dead and white with age. This young forest was cut up by wet grassy sloughs and small patches of prairie edged with hazel brush, plum patches, and groves of white barked poplar.

Just across to the northwest was a slough with a little prairie along its north side of three or four acres which we called the West Slough. Along the borders of the little prairie were patches of plum trees that bore wonderful crops of delicious fruit; and a little to the north in the brush was perhaps a half acre of prairie entirely surrounded by a plum thicket worthy of the name we had bestowed on it—The Plum Prairie. The West Prairie, an area of maybe ten acres, lay to the southwest near the center of the brush land. The southern part of this second growth area we called the Foote Lot. Why, I do not know.

To the north, east and south, it was pretty much the same. Red Oak and poplar brush were sometimes so thick one could scarcely get through it, except for scattering fields where areas of prairie had been broken up by the settlers. A few hickory trees, some of them big old fellows, were usually found scattered about also.

Over to the northeast on the Minert and Laughlin lands, there was a body of heavy timber of oak, maple, basswood, and elm, having an irregular area of about a quarter section. Parts of this woods produced in their season wonderful crops of wild blackberries. I have often picked a milk pail full

of a morning. To the north of this woods and across Williams Run was the westerly terminus of a great prairie that extended south and east, almost without interruption to beyond Garnavillo, twenty-five miles away.

On June 14th, 1857, I was born in the log house where my uncle John lived, near the top of the John Orr Hill, about three miles west of McGregor on the Old Military Road, where my parents were then living temporarily. At the end of the first summer on the farm near Postville, they sold it and moved to McGregor, but they moved back again that fall when squire Timothy Stiles, who had purchased the farm, had to deed it back again on account of failure to realize on a farm further west that he supposed he had sold.

## 2. Growing Up

Many and many a pleasant memory I have of work and play connected with the barn that my father built in the strength of his young manhood, as it and I grew older together. In those years the big mow was filled with wild hay; timothy, clover and June grass were then unknown in Iowa. The wild hay was very fragrant and so hard to load on the wagon; it was so slippery. Father and Jimmy Whalen cut it with scythes, tossed out the swathes with forks, and gathered the cured hay into windrows with hand rakes. Then it was cooked, or as Jimmy would say, stoked, ready to haul to the barn.

Jimmy always pitched on the load and father pitched it off to Jimmy who mowed it away. And how evenly he would spread it about and tramp it down. As soon as the first loads were in, we boys would climb up on the high beams and jump far down into it. Once there might have been a tragedy for just as I was about to jump, I saw a rattlesnake coiled up on the hay directly below me. It was the small black prairie rattlesnake, the massasaugua, which reached a length of eighteen or twenty inches. It was very common in the sloughs and wet lands where the hay was cut, and many were killed each year. The particular one that we found in the mow that day had been pitched up on the load and



then pitched off, without being discovered. Frightened, we ran for father and Jimmy who were taking their noonday nap. Needless to say his snakeship's career ended shortly after; but somehow jumping down into the hay had no attraction for us after that.

I have known of other cases when snakes were pitched onto a load in forkfuls of hay or bundles of wheat, but always they made a great fuss with their rattles, scaring the loader, and were promptly thrown off and dispatched. In later years my brother Darias was bitten by one. He was then about twelve years old. Sometimes on Sunday evenings father would hitch the team to the "Democrat" wagon and take mother and us children for a ride out to the commons to the west where the cattle pastured, and bring them home. I was not along this particular Sunday. My brother, who was barefoot, got out of the wagon to see if they could safely cross the wet slough that ran along the south side of the West Prairie, and without seeing it, stepped on the snake and was bitten.

My father got him into the wagon and squeezed the blood and poison out of the two pricks in the skin made by the teeth and then hurried to the doctor at Postville. The poison and the whiskey that the doctor gave my brother made him very sick, but he recovered. After getting out of bed, he had to hobble around on crutches for quite a number of days. Strange as it may seem, during the following summer, the ankle on which he had been bitten swelled up and was so painful that for two or three days he could not use the foot.

A neighbor boy, a stepson of Jimmy Whalen, was bitten in the harvest field. Prompt and vigorous squeezing out of the poison saved this boy's life, but he was lame for some time afterwards.

Shep, a black shepherd dog that we owned about this time, was the scourge of the rattlesnake tribe and many was the one he accounted for. In attacking, he would feint a snap and when the snake struck, dodge, and before it could recover, have him by the middle; then a shake finished the job. Once, however, the snake was too quick, and for several days we kept Shep in the old smokehouse with a head as big as a "patent" wooden pail. But Shep was a real dog. Once

I saw him whip a prairie wolf, and he could run down and catch a cottontail rabbit.

In those days, the massasaugua was so common that our summer kill was from twenty-five to fifty, all met with accidentally for we never hunted them. Mr. Perry, who succeeded Marston on the farm joining us on the north, one summer in three days killed thirty-five in a patch of timothy that he had let ripen for seed. This "varmit," we believe, is now extinct in the country around Postville.

The large yellow rattlesnake was not found on the prairies around Postville and consequently was not an acquaintance of my boyhood. It was not till after I grew up and went out on surveying jobs that I met up with this fellow. Its habitat is the rocky bluffs along the rivers where it is still too common for the peace of mind of surveyors, geologists, botanists, and picnickers who have occasion to visit its domain.

The new house was about one-fourth mile from the Marston home to the north, and the lure of the boys there got Darias and me into trouble. We learned to run away and go over there to play. One day when we were busy enjoying our stolen visit, father came suddenly around the corner of the house. He had a little switch in his hand and we started for home quickly. Right behind us came father and that day we broke the record on the home stretch. However, the matter was compromised by mother afterwards giving us permission to go halfway over to the place where two old logs lay beside the road; to which place the Marston boys were also permitted to come. I do not remember if the plan worked out well or not, but I do remember that the old logs lay there for years until they finally went to pieces with decay.

In those days the only fences were of rails ten feet long, split out of oak and elm logs. The slippery elm, *Ulmus fulva*, was supposed to make the most durable ones. Out of these was built a very substantial zig-zag fence. The bottom rails were laid on a small flat stone or block of wood. The pioneers believed that if the fence was built in the "dark of the moon" it would sink into the ground, but if it was built in the "light of the moon" it would not.

After eight or ten rails were laid, the fence was completed by setting two stakes, eight feet long, at the corners so as to form an X, in the upper part of which was laid the riders. This made a solid fence over which only a few of the lanky, scrub, half-wild cattle of that day ever acquired the high art of jumping. It was said to be horse high, pig tight, and bull stout; but there are exceptions to all rules and old sayings and there were a few animals that had acquired the trick, earning them the dishonorable title of "breachy." One of these, a big rangy red steer, one year annoyed father till he went after him with a gun. This particular fellow would clear a six-foot fence without touching it. First he would rear up, throw the front part of his body over, and as that end came down his hind end went up. One day, at this particular stage of his jump, father was near enough to plant the full charge of shot about the roots of his tail. With a bellow of pain he tore off through the brush and never came back again.

Sometimes, in clearing the land, a windrow of piled up brush was made to answer for a fence. The rail fence was superseded by one of burr oak posts set eight feet apart on which were nailed three or four peeled poplar poles. The groves were full of patches of slim, straight trees of this species. Boards six inches wide eventually took the place of the the poles, which were not very durable, and the place of these in turn was taken by barbed wire.

The curtain of memory lifts again and I see myself on the first bench at school in the frame granary near the Minert home that was being used for summer school. On the back seat was Frank Nolan, a big boy, maybe eight years old, who on his way to school that morning had found a bird's nest which he had robbed. He had sneaked the eggs into his desk. Taking one out to play with, he let it drop, breaking it for which he got a whipping.

To reach the school we went north a mile along the road and then northwest over a footpath across a meadow to the creek which we crossed on a foot log. The school house was just a little way from the crossing. One day, my younger brother Darías came to school with me as a visitor. In cross-



ing the foot log, he fell into the creek. As it was only a few inches deep, nothing came of it but a good wetting for the visitor and much sympathy from the teacher and the little girls.

Strangely, I have only the most misty recollections of attending school in the new schoolhouse that was built beside the creek out on the road directly north from our house. We used to go storming out to play at recess and at noon; and we used to play two old cat, andy over, sock ball and pom-pom-pull-away. In winter we had a sliding place down the high bank by the creek. As we grew older, we slid down the long slopes of the north and south hills bounding the creek valley and played fox and geese over on the meadows to the north.

Many of the boys attending school in the winter were then almost grown men. Some came simply to pass away the time, whereas others tried hard to learn a little reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic. In summer, every boy who was big enough—and they didn't have to be very big—had to work on the farm. In the winter, they came to school and the house was full.

Some years after the building of the new house by grandfather, a wing was built on the west side. This addition was a large commodious room with a door into the old living room, which we then called the sitting room, and another into the pantry. A door on the south opened onto the porch, which was built over the outside cellarway, to the cellar under the old main part of the house. Later still, father built a bedroom onto the west end of the wing.

A few feet from the southwest corner of the main part of our house was the twenty-five-foot-deep, rock-walled, open well from which we pulled up the water with an old oaken bucket attached to a well rope. Around the mouth of the well was a well curb of pine boards. Across the top, fitting into half-round notches in the boards on opposite sides, was the round oak log windlass about six inches in diameter with a wooden crank. Turning the crank wound up the rope with the dripping bucket full of water. On one side of the curb was a wide spout made of boards. On the part projecting

outside was hung the pail and into the part inside was poured the water from the bucket.

Some of the settlers built quite pretentious curbs with a roof over the top, whereas others substituted the more primitive well sweep for the windlass. This latter was a long pole fastened in the crotch of a forked post set a little to one side of the well. About two-thirds or three-fourths of the pole was on the well side of the post; to the end of it, which was directly over the well, was attached the well rope. The short end of the sweep was weighted with a rock to make the contrivance balance when the bucket was full of water.

To operate it, the person who wanted the pail of water would pull on the rope, thus pulling down the pole and lowering the bucket into the water in the well. When it was filled, "the drawer of water" would step to the short weighted end and pull it down, lifting the bucket to the level of the top of the curb where it would hang because of the balanced sweep. In those days the ground water level was very near the surface. Few wells were deeper than twenty-five feet.

At the west end of the porch, the cistern held the soft water collected from the roof. To us who now have, as a matter of course, all the conveniences of the times, it is not easy to understand just how much the building of this cistern meant to my mother.

At about halfway between the house and the barn was the fence that separated the dooryard from the barnyard. A much-used gate let us through and sometimes let in the pigs or cattle when we were careless. Just outside this gate in the barnyard was the woodpile, or more properly the place where we worked up the sled length poles and logs into stove wood. About 150 feet west from the gate, the yard fence turned north and ran in that direction for perhaps 400 feet, then east to the road fence.

Along the road fence on the northeast of the house and the fence on the west side of the yard, father early set a row of soft maple trees that now, in 1928, are three or more feet in diameter. I remember well when he brought them home from town, a bundle of little whips with roots.

The part of the yard north of the house, I remember as sometimes potato patch, sometimes the calf lot and sometimes an orchard. Father was always setting out fruit trees, but somehow they never lived to a very great age. Among those north of the house, I remember the St. Lawrence and russets. Even in the kitchen garden in the southwest corner of the yard he had apple trees and a row of tame gooseberry bushes; among the apple trees that father planted was Rawle's Genet that for a few years bore wonderful crops of small but excellent apples. All the garden truck grown in the kitchen garden, except the potatoes and tomatoes, had to be planted in raised beds with paths between. West of the house was a bunch of native plum trees, the fruit of which was no good when compared with what we could find in exceeding abundance in the plum thickets along the edges of the prairies of the wild land to the west of us.

Over the front door of the house was a small porch, six by six feet, with a bench or seat on each side. Straight in front of it was the front gate which was flanked on each side by cottonwoods. In the front yard, father had set transcendent and hyslop crabs and cherry trees. These came into bearing, lived their short day and died. Of all the fruit trees set out by my father, and they were many for he remembered the orchards of New York State and did his part in trying to reproduce them in the west, not one is now living. But the great soft maples, unless they are cut down, will stand for many a year yet as a monument to the memory of the homely efforts of a pioneer to beautify his surroundings.

To the west of the gate into the barnyard stood the leach, in those days a very necessary bit of farm equipment used in the making of soft soap. In order to make the leach, one side of a small log about four feet long was flattened and a trough cut into it with an axe or adz. This was then laid on a couple of rocks, trough side up; a post was set on each side of each end of it, and the tops were joined by cross pieces from which boards were laid slanting into the trough, making a sort of V-shaped bin, three or four feet deep.

At the bottom of this bin, a few small sticks covered



with straw were placed. The wood ashes from the ash barrels, in which they had accumulated, were dumped in, tamped down and water poured over them. Presently, the water soaked through and a strong lye ran out of the trough. This was gathered in a pail set to catch it and emptied into the great iron kettle set a little to one side on some rocks. A proper amount of lard cracklings and refuse scraps of pork fat were then added and the whole boiled. After a time, the fatty matter would be dissolved and the mixture allowed to cool. The housewife now had a kettle of jelly-like soap that had a wonderful capacity for devouring dirt.

Another necessary adjunct was the smokehouse, a small building used for curing and smoking the hams, bacon and other products of the annual butchering of hogs for home consumption. The meat was taken from the brine in which it was first placed and hung up in the smokehouse where a small smouldering fire of hickory chips or of clean corn cobs was built under it. If the settler had not yet arrived at the dignity of a smokehouse of boards, or better yet of stone, he hung his meat in a barrel which he turned over the fire.

Every year in those early years, at Christmas time there came from the old home back in York State, a literal barrel of good cheer. In it was clothing for us children (once I got a pair of boots with red tops), things for mother and the house, lots of dried fruit and some nice red apples. No part of those apples was wasted. We used to stand around when mother was peeling some of these to make a pie, waiting for the peelings and cores.

I do not remember that any books or toys were sent, nor do I remember father or mother ever buying us any; though I can recall that once I possessed a much cherished big clear glass marble with a lion of some white metal in the center. For Christmas we were given striped stick candy, raisins, nuts and apples.

Once father made Darias and me a bow and arrow of hickory. My first shot made a nice big hole in the paper window shade and we were sent out of doors to practice. This was early in the spring, and we soon became masters

of our weapon. One day when there was a great flight of wild pigeons passing over, we were playing with these "bow-narrows" in the calf pasture north of the house. Father had made us a lot of arrows of the seed stems from cattails. The birds were flying low and we could shoot these light arrows up into the flocks, a hundred feet in the air. I can remember how the birds would scurry to one side as they slithered up among them.

Such playthings as we had we mostly made for ourselves. Tops were whittled out of spools, balls made of old yarn, and whistles, in their season of poplar and willow. I can still remember the first whistle that I saw or had. We had met the Marston boys on the road halfway between our homes, and they were tootling on their newly made whistles. With due ceremony they showed us how to make and blow them. One time they took us behind a door of their kitchen where it was a little dark and showed us how to strike sparks with what was probably a flint and steel. One of the pieces used they called a henstone.

About that time, father made us a sled out of oak boards shod with hoop iron. At school we slid down the short, steep slope to the creek on barrel staves. Much of the time, we didn't take time to bother with these and I can well remember how disgusted and angry father would get when our boots would have to be taken to old Aleck Curry, the cobbler, to be half-soled. Curry was an old time shoemaker and could make boots and shoes as well as mend them.

I had a place on some boards far up in the peak of the barn and hard to reach, where like a crow I hid away my treasures: a crossbow, sundry figure fours, a walnut dart, and other things on which I set store. When we became old enough to be trusted with it, father got us a squirrel gun. It had been a rifle, shooting a bullet about as large as a big pea, was a muzzle loader, and used a percussion cap. The spring of the lock was so weak that often it failed to explode the cap, and because of this I once nearly shot one of the boys with me. The cap had failed to go off and, cocking the hammer, I took the worthless thing off the nipple and threw it away. I pulled the trigger as the easiest way to bring the

hammer down, and off went the gun. A little of the fulminate in the cap had adhered to the nipple, and there was force enough in the blow of the falling hammer to explode it

Later, we acquired a real Kentucky deer rifle that had been brought into the country by Duncan McDonald, who had shot many a deer with it. Then we traded the squirrel gun with the weak spring for a Sharp's army rifle, a leftover from the war. With these guns, we became really good marksmen. We never thought of shooting at any part of a squirrel except his head even in the tallest trees, and we usually got him.

When we got old enough, we played baseball on Sundays or went swimming down on the Yellow River and wrestled and jumped. We had a trapeze in the barn and a turning pole in the back yard. Darias could lay an inch board on the ground, and with a couple of car links hooked from a freight car for dumb bells, he could jump twelve feet, then move the board to where he had lighted and jump back. Of course the ground had to be level. No local man could outjump him.

### 3. Farming

For the original home eighty, father paid \$9.00 per acre. It was an inferior piece of land in that between fifteen and twenty acres of it were unfit for cultivation, being at that time wet sloughs. The slough along the south side and the big slough across the west end were so swampy that they could not be crossed by wagon except on corduroy. There was always water running in them. The slough which came down out of Marston's southeast corner also usually required a corduroy crossing.

The south slough, the big slough, the west slough, the Marston slough, and another that headed up near the Marston farm, divided the farm into five areas suitable for cultivation besides a three-cornered area of about an acre in the northwest corner. Besides the Old House Spring there was, twenty rods to the south, the Oil Spring, which some speculators



once thought showed oil (petroleum) blossom, and two other boggy small streams between, all coming out of the lower Makoqueta Shales, as did Jimmy's Well still farther south.

Not much of this eighty acres had been broken when father got it, and except for about eight acres, he cleared the remainder. It was brush land of oak, poplar, and hickory. Father left seven of these hickories for the nuts which they bore and I suspect, too, partly because they were hard to grub. From the shucks and bark of these trees there were two and perhaps three species. One of these, the "big hickory," which stood in the middle of the center field, was without doubt a shag or shell bark, *Hicoria ovata*, and was a wonderful tree. In good years we would get a grain sack full of shucked nuts, the largest and thinnest shelled of any Iowa hickory nuts that I ever saw. I remember that I gathered such a sack full on the day that Chicago burned, October 8, 1871.

Across the big slough was the log schoolhouse where mother taught school the first summer they were on the farm. This building was afterwards sold to Jimmy Whalen who moved it over onto his eighty, which bounded father's on the south.

The total equipment with which father commenced to farm his eighty acres was a yoke of oxen, some cows and pigs, a lumber wagon with box and rack, a plow, a harrow, a double shovel plow for plowing corn, a scythe, a cradle for harvesting the wheat, an axe, a spade, hoe, rake, fork and some other small tools. He also got a span of colts and soon had a team of horses.

In those days wheat and oats were sown broadcast by hand. The sower would put a piece of corn cob in one corner of the bottom of a sack, then tie a strong string to the same side of the mouth of the sack and around the corn cob; he would then put a half bushel or so of wheat in the sack, and sling it over his right shoulder so that the grain was under his left arm with the open mouth in front of him. Two or three poles would be set in a line across the field to go by. As the sower stepped off, he would thrust his right hand into the mouth of the sack, grasp a handful of grain, and

swing back his hand as the next step was taken. On the next step, the hand with the grain would be swung outward and over, scattering the grain. At the end of the swing, the hand would again be quickly thrust into the sack for another handful, and so *ad infinitum*.

The sown grain was covered with a harrow or, as it was sometimes called, a drag, a frame of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  by  $2\frac{1}{2}$  pieces of oak in which were set steel teeth like large square spikes. Drawn over the ground the harrow tore up, mellowed, and covered the grain. Sometimes a brush drag was made by boring holes through an oak pole and inserting small brushy trees in them.

The wheat and oats were harvested with the cradle, raking up the swath with a hand rake, and binding by hand. Father did the cradling, Jimmy Whalen the binding. The first year or two, the wheat was threshed with a flail which consists of two hickory sticks about the size of a fork handle, one about four feet and the other about two feet long; the end of one was tied to the end of the other by a raw hide string. The thresher took the longer stick in both hands like a fork and moved it vigorously in such a way that the end away from him would move in a circle, one to two feet above the spread-out grain to be beaten and the grain threshed out. This would swing the short piece in a circle, and as it came round it would come down, whack, whack, whack on the grain on the clean floor, or if the pioneer had no floor, then in his wagon box.

Corn ground was marked out with a marker of three short pieces of two-by-sixes bolted to a couple of boards sled fashion. It was marked both ways and at the crossings the corn was dropped, three or four kernels to the hill, and covered with a hoe. In the fine, mellow, almost virgin soil of those days, Jimmy Whalen and another man one day covered twenty acres, keeping eight droppers busy. It was some day's work. Years afterwards, Darias and I planted another twenty acres with a hand-drop Keystone horse-drawn planter. This was a ten mile drive dropping four hills every rod. It was some day's work, too.

Except for shooing the passenger pigeons off the newly

sown wheat fields, dropping corn was my first fieldwork. Then we got the hand corn planter: a wooden business that you thrust into the ground, and worked with a handle or handles that opened blades and dropped the corn; after it was pulled out of the ground you stepped on the hill. After that came the team-drawn, two-row planter. With this planter, one drove and one dropped seed. Dropping was like shooting pigeons on the wing. You had to yank the lever before reaching the crossing so that the corn would strike it; it required skill. Then we got the check rower. I have used them all.

For the wheat, the hand-rake reaper followed the cradle. I drove ours and cut many an acre while father raked the grain off the platform in gavels ready to be bound by hand. Then we had the self-rake, and then the harvester on which two men rode and bound the grain and then the self-binder.

Father says in his reminiscences that he prospered on the home eighty. Every year, as he cleared more land, there was more wheat to sell and more hogs. The wheat was hauled to McGregor where a load would bring a twenty-dollar gold piece which would buy a lot of the necessities of living, that was all they spent money for in those days.

Along in the winter there would be a butchering of the fat hogs at which three or four of the neighbors assisted. Two great kettles were set on rocks or logs and a hot fire was built under them to heat the water for scalding. It was my job to keep that water hot, and I had to stay by it.

A hog was hit on the head by an axe and stunned, or it was shot in the forehead with a squirrel rifle, and neighbor Waxler would stick it. Then it was dragged over to the platform against which leaned the scalding barrel filled with hot water from the kettles and into which the hog was plunged head first; it was plunged in and out a few times, taken out, turned and plunged in again for a few more souses, and then out onto the platform it went, where the scrapers soon removed the hair. A gambrel, a stout stick pointed at each end, was then inserted in the hind legs at the knees and the hog was hung up on a strong pole with nose just off the ground, to be washed clean and the entrails removed



by some one expert at that. The then finished and dressed pork was left to freeze solid. In a day or two the frozen hogs would be hauled to McGregor and sold. Sometimes as many as forty hogs were butchered in a day, but then everyone had to be expert at his particular part of the job.

Another source of cash revenue was the prairie hay, loads of which could be sold at McGregor. Eggs and butter could be traded at the store in Postville for groceries.

I must have been ten or twelve years old when father bought the Post eighty for \$12.00 per acre. I remember how we were all considerably excited over the purchase. The north end of this eighty acres joined the east end of the old home purchase on the south.

The Old Military Trail, following the divide between the Turkey and Yellow Rivers, crossed the Post Eighty towards its north end, part of a great curve around the head of Robert's Creek, southwest across its west line to Postville. North of the trail was a fine dense grove of young pin oak, among which were scattered veteran old seed trees, some half dozen of which I particularly remember.

South of the old trail there were burr oak openings—scattering burr oaks with hazel brush. This part we cleared by grubbing, burning the brush, working the tree trunks into fence posts, and breaking up with the big sixteen-inch plow drawn by two yoke of oxen and a team of horses. The buying of that land brought a lot of hard work for me. As I did not like to work with a team until the land was cleared and broken up, much of my time was spent in helping with that. I came in for my share of the regular hard work of haying, harvesting and threshing, but when I could be spared from the team work, I worked at trimming and working up the trees, and piling and burning the brush. I did no grubbing as I was too young for that back-breaking work.

Then we bought thirty-five acres off the south side of the Jimmy Whalen eighty, which lay to the west of the Post Eighty. This was the same kind of land and required the same treatment to make wheat land of it. Father paid \$30.00 per acre for it, and the first crop of wheat sold for \$32.00 per acre. That was making money.

During all these years, wheat was *the* crop. Then there came a year when unusually hot weather, a few days before the wheat was ready to harvest, ruined the crop. We did not even harvest enough wheat for our own flour. For two more years we tried it and each year burned the crop on the ground. The ninety acres made a great fire. All around us other farmers were doing the same. During those years many hundreds of thousands of dollars went up in smoke.

After this loss, we turned to raising corn and hogs and to dairying, and made even more money than in raising wheat, and with less hard labor. The land was not cleared and the big plow was laid to one side. I wonder what became of it. This big plow would cut roots one and one-half inches in diameter, and would roll them under like a common plow would stubble. Father held the handles and guided it and Jimmy Whalen drove the two yoke of stubborn oxen while I drove the team of horses or rode the nigh one.

When I was about eighteen, father bought the farm that lay mostly south of the railroad, on which there was a new house and he moved this house over into the shelter of the grove on the north side of the Military Trail. He built an addition onto this, dug a well and set out an orchard.

He, himself, dug the cylindrical shaft, five feet in diameter, through two sheets of till, about thirty feet in thickness, down to the Fort Atkinson limestone, while Darias and I hauled the earth out with a bucket and windlass. When he struck the older or lower sheet, probably Nebraskan, whereas the upper sheet was Kansan, many strange and interesting kinds of rock began to come up in the bucket--granite, quartz, greenstone, jasper, and one the size of a pail, not quartz, but which was a rich creamy white and had drift scratches on it. Between the two tills was a layer of black soil, two or three feet thick, in which were many fragments of wood. One piece of root was six inches through and a foot long.

#### 4. Neighbors

About halfway between the house that grandfather built on the home eighty and Marston's along the road north, a

lane ran east eighty rods to the old Laughlin home. Squire Laughlin had some money when he came into the country and early built himself a two-story frame house with a story and a half wing on the north. In this wing there was an old-time fireplace of generous dimensions. How well I remember that fireplace and its generous heat on winter days; it was used long after fireplaces had gone out of fashion. The house had a big living room and a well under the wide back porch also.

On the north side of the lane was a three-cornered field of about three acres, on the north side of which was big timber which the squire had early set out to orchard, most of which were seedling trees that bore pretty well—at least we thought they were good, clean apples. As apples were very scarce then, there was always a ready sale for the entire crop. As we boys wanted apples and had no money to buy, we resorted to the time-honored way of boys and slipped over nights and took what we wanted to eat. After a raid we would hide our apples in the hay or in the oat bin to mellow them. Even after the crop had been picked, we would still go, on our hands and knees, feeling around in the grass for any apples that might have been hidden there or might have been missed in the gathering.

Down in the corner, at the end of the lane, where the slough ran across Marston's southeast corner into ours, was a fine patch of cattails in a bit of swamp. Now the cattails have long since stopped growing in this corner and the slough is dry. Corn now grows where so many red-wings raised their families and where I found a nest of the Virginia rail made of cattail leaves, grass and trash, the top just above the water and full of yellow, brown-speckled eggs.

Jimmy Whalen paid Uncle Sam \$1.25 per acre in gold for his eighty. Jimmy was an Irish bachelor who had helped to grade railroads in Wales, England, Connecticut and Illinois, and had worked on the York and Erie canal with a pick, shovel and wheelbarrow. Close to the north line of his land stood the Half Way House built by the government in 1840 for the accommodation of teamsters hauling supplies to Fort



Atkinson, and to which, in 1841, an addition was made by Joel Post. But this building appears to have been torn down before Jimmy bought the land. He bought the log schoolhouse that stood across the swampy brook from the log house which was our first home, and moved it over onto his farm and rebuilt it a little to the southeast of where the Half-Way House stood. This he never floored till he married later. He doubtless had been raised, as had my father, in a house with only an earth floor.

He and father worked together very much in opening up and fencing their farms and in harvesting their crops. Our cattle pastured on the wild land to the west and on the Post eighty before it was cleared. It was the job of us boys to hunt for and bring them home every night. Then there were many cattle running on the commons, each owner having a bell on the boss cow of his herd. All these bells were different in tone, and we could tell ours as far as we could hear it. But sometimes the cows would stray off into out-of-the-way places, and then we would get Jimmy to help us find them. Many a time the kindly Irishman tramped with us in search of those ornery cows. I can see him yet, with his stubby beard, leading the way at a good clip while we boys trotted after.

Down by the brook side was a spring, which Jimmy called his well, where he got his water. Once when he was building rail fences along that same swampy brook, bare-footed, he was carrying rails from a pile to lay on the fence. On one of his trips to and fro, he found a prairie rattlesnake; a massasaugua had crawled across his path, but with a well-directed kick with his bare foot he sent it whirling rods away through the air.

Another time, when he was also building rail fence a little east of where the Half-Way House stood, he found an old buckskin purse which he picked up, and finding nothing in it, threw away. Perhaps ten years after, when rebuilding this fence, he again found the purse, now much decayed, out of which dropped a ten-dollar gold piece.

When I was about twelve he married a widow with a boy a couple of years older than I. Some Irish women in

town had made the match, and the widow made him a good wife. From the boy, John, we boys learned to play euchre, and once when father caught us playing in the haymow, we nearly got a tanning.

Scattered everywhere through the groves and brush lands were remnants of the prairie which the forest growth had not yet captured. Along the borderland, between the prairie and the encroaching brush, were wild plum and crab apple patches in great abundance, with less frequent clusters of red, black, and choke cherry and patches of red raspberry and grape vines. Before the coming of rusts and blights, the fruit of these wild trees was excellent and abundant. The finest fruit grew along the borders of the West Slough. This fruit consisted of the patches of plum prairie and the patches at the head of another small slough east of the former. These were our favorite patches. When the ripe fruit had fallen, the ground underneath was covered so thickly that one could not put his hand down without covering half a dozen. The fruit of some of these plum patches also was as large and of as excellent a flavor as any of the cultivated sorts produced in recent years. Mother made the most delicious preserves from them.

Some patches of crab apple also were large and of a rare aromatic flavor. One patch on the north side of the grove on the Post eighty, bore fruit as large as the transcendent crab, a cultivated variety abundantly planted in those days. Of these, too, mother made preserves such as could be made from no other fruit. In season of bloom, the fragrance of these wild plum and crab apple patches was noticeable for rods away. Down in the valley of Williams Run, where it is crossed by the town line between Post and Franklin townships, a couple of miles northeast of Bethel Church, one of these patches of crab apple persisted after disease and pasturing had exterminated them elsewhere; and for several years, at blossoming time, I took the long walk of five miles down there and sat around for an hour or two enjoying the strong, rich, all-pervading perfume.

Over in the Laughlin and Minert woods, three-fourths mile to the northeast, there were acres of blackberries in

their season. One could pick a milk pail full of large luscious berries of a morning. Owing to the abundant moisture of those early days, the fruit grew to large size and the flavor of the dead ripe berries was unsurpassed by any cultivated variety. Now the tall corn grows where was once this woods, and wild blackberries, such as we picked there, are found no more. The clearing of the land and pasturage, as well as lack of moisture, has greatly reduced the area suited to their growth, and this, with the rust, gives us now, on such bushes as survive, only small worthless berries.

In the grass of the drier slough were found fine, large, and very luscious wild strawberries. Over in the slough, where the sandhill cranes came down and rested, the strawberries were exceptionally fine. Many times have I picked a hatful there.

Of wild gooseberries I remember only scattering bushes along the road to school, but they were abundant in places in the big woods. There were two varieties—one smooth, the other larger, covered with prickles. Alongside the road to school, at the top of the Minert Hill, was a large old bur oak tree that had been broken off at some distance above the ground. The center of this old stub was filled with rotten wood, and in it grew and flourished a gooseberry bush, whose fruit we were never able to sample.

My earliest recollection is of playing with a little girl in the dirt banked against the side of the log house at the west end of the farm in which we were living. Her mother was visiting with my mother after the fashion of those pioneer days. She had probably walked a mile or two, bringing her work with her. This "going visiting" was a very common custom among the pioneer women. They would take some work, sewing or knitting, and start for some neighbors, with the children trailing along behind like chickens after a mother hen. And they would stay the whole afternoon, often helping the neighbor woman with her work. Except for going to church, it was about all the social life they had.

During the summer of 1859, my grandfather, who was a carpenter, came out to Iowa and built a new frame house at the east end of the farm on the public road. The sills of



this house were hewn out of logs and the remainder of the lumber was sawed from maple, oak, and basswood logs by one of the little water power mills that was built along Sawmill Creek and Yellow River about this time. The window, door casings, doors, window frames and shingles were of white pine, purchased and hauled from McGregor.

He planed the flooring of seasoned maple by hand. It is not likely that he swore about it since he was a good Presbyterian, but it is remembered that he "complained a lot" about how hard it was to dress and tongue and groove those boards that were almost as hard as iron.

For years the second half story of this house was not finished except to floor it. We children who slept there would sometimes awaken on stormy winter mornings to find over our beds an additional cover that was not there the night before but had sifted in through tiny cracks and crevice—pure white snow.

The second event in my life that I can remember was my father carrying me in his arms when he went in to inspect the newly plastered rooms of the first story of this new house. How big and empty and awesome they must have looked to me.

On the first floor there was a living room, a bedroom, a small pantry (called a buttery), and the cellarway. This was roominess when compared with the log house which had but one room, on one side of which stood the beds while at the opposite side was a cupboard and a stove. My father used to say that he could almost lie in bed and start the morning fire, so snug was that room. Yet to it my mother brought a touch of the home she had left, for she could boast of a rag carpet on the floor and curtains to the windows. Few of the other housewives knew so much of luxury.

Later a barn was built about two-hundred feet south of the new house, with a big haymow in the south end, a driveway across near the middle, bins for wheat and oats and a mow over them in the north end. Part of the roof was covered with oak clapboards split with a frow out of two-foot sections of a clear, straight-grained log. The frame, sills, posts, plates and girts, and the planks for the driveway floor

were hewed or sawed from logs of native trees. The boards with which it was sided were white pine, hauled from McGregor. There was, at first, no basement, the sills resting on rocks or blocks of wood. A few years after the barn was built, father raised the floor of the south mow high enough to give room for a stable with three double stalls beneath. I can remember when they slid in the big elm logs, hewn flat on two sides, and set posts under them to support the floor of loose boards that held up the hay of the mow.

When we were children, mother made all our clothes out of cloth bought by the yard at the store or from the salesman for the woolen mills at Village Creek. She spun these rolls into yarn from which she knit our stockings and mittens. She also made candles and soap from the lard of the hogs that we butchered for home use and for the market, churned the butter from the cream raised in the shallow crocks set on the cellar floor to keep the milk cool, and baked the bread from flour ground at the mills on Yellow River from wheat raised on the farm. And last and most importantly mother raised her family decently and in order. How she did it all is still a wonder to me. I can see her yet stepping back and forth beside the spinning wheel as she spun the rolls of wool into yarn, or as she sat evenings at her knitting, from time to time fitting the mittens to our hands to see if she was getting them the right size.

Her spinning wheel consisted of an oak plank about three feet long on three short legs. At one end was an upright post perhaps two feet high on which the big, light, vertical wooden wheel stood, while at the other end, which was a trifle higher, was a shorter post on the end of which was the patent head, a frame of round pieces that carried the horizontal steel spindle, perhaps ten or twelve inches long and a sixteenth of an inch in diameter. On the spindle was a small pulley, and below that was another. These were connected by a cord belt and from them ran another cord belt to and around the big wheel. In due time she got a Howe sewing machine and a washing machine that worked with a lever. How much hard labor these saved her. Besides, we youngsters, as soon as we were large enough, helped at whatever we could do:

rocked the cradle, brought in the wood and water, gathered the eggs, churned, put wicks in the candle moulds and ran errands.

When mother whirled the big wheel with her right hand, the spindle would buzz aplenty. She would take one of the carded wool rolls in her left hand and, holding one end on the end of the spindle, turn the wheel and the roll would be twisted into a yarn. She would then reverse the wheel, winding the yarn back on the spindle, hold the end of the yarn and of a new roll together, turn the wheel forward, twisting that roll into yarn, winding it onto the spindle, and so on until the spindle was full. Then she would wind it off onto the reel. A string was tied around every so many yarns on this reel making a skein. Skeins were taken off the reel and one of us would hold them on our outstretched hands while the other wound it into a ball. Or we would place it over two chairs, turned back to back a little way apart, and walking round and round, wind it into a ball.

If we were lazy or neglectful of our work or ran away, there was always a little switch, called a persuader, handy. Still, although I doubtless deserved it often enough, I cannot remember mother ever giving me a whipping, and can recall father whipping me but twice. Probably I deserved both of them, though I did not think so at the time.

To Be Continued . . . .

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*Correction:* In the last issue of the ANNALS, Volume XL, No. 6, Fall, 1970, the title of the article by Gerard R. Case, on page 445, contained a misspelled word. The title of the article should have read: **[The Occurrence Of Petrodus And Other Fossil Sharp Remains In The Pennsylvanian Of Iowa.]**

The Editor



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